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EDITORIAL

RESOLVED that the Mississippi Valley Association of State Geologists expresses its belief in the desirability of a thorough reconsideration of the principles which should govern the nomenclature of geology, and its willingness to co-operate in any movement for the bettering of present conditions.

AND RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be sent to the secretary of the Geological Society of America, be presented to the conference of geologists now in session in Washington, and to Director Smith of the U. S. Geological Survey.

This is an action most heartily to be commended. We note with peculiar pleasure that the association desires *a thorough reconsideration of principles*, not a mere temporizing agreement for putting into more common and oppressive use current methods, some of which are good, some indifferent, and some bad. A special nomenclature is a grave burden to a science at best, but when it becomes positively bad, the affliction is grievous indeed. Geology does not suffer from this so much as the biological and mineralogical sciences, but it necessarily participates in their afflictions and has some special and quite unnecessary ones of its own. It is probably safe to say that several times as many people as are now interested in our science would be among its enthusiastic promoters, if its great truths had been habitually clothed in the plainest available terms in the literature of the past century. The history of the earth and of its inhabitants, the processes of its evolution, and the facts of its structure are inherently interesting, and if the story were so told that it could be read easily and intelligibly, it would give both pleasure and profit; but the current of the reader's enjoyment is so often needlessly checked by unintelligible terms, that he soon becomes weary and lays the annoying text aside for something less trammeled by pedantic toggery. This is not solely a layman's affliction. Geological readers of no mean literary and scientific attainments are all too frequently caught and held by the briars and brambles of our crudely technicalized literature. The fundamental sin is the offspring of the vanity of scholasticism. Could anything better characterize the typical scholasticus than our practice of using "syncline" for bent strata that outcrop divergently, and "anticline" for those that outcrop convergently? The terms do not even become intelligible when the reader is told that they are "from the Greek . . . . , meaning . . . . ;" he must learn and *constantly remember* that there is a suppressed "downward" to be read after each of these terms. The "downward" is consistently suppressed, for it is just as plebeian as sag or arch, or any of the vulgar English equivalents which might have been used to tell the whole story in the first place. But the folly does not all lie in the vanities of classical erudition. It is just as bad to make "heave" mean a horizontal movement as to make "syncline" mean bent beds that diverge as they outcrop. The literature of science is full of phrases wrested from their current meanings and forced into special senses, which special and forced senses *must always be remembered*, if the reader would know what is meant. "Viscous" was a good word before it was criminalized. Starting with a liquid like molasses, we could once say that, as it was boiled, it became more and more viscous up to a maximum viscosity, beyond which, either by further boiling or by cooling, it became less viscous and more solid until it came to be distinctively rigid and brittle, a state which common people never thought of calling viscous. So, on the other hand, starting with glass, a very brittle solid, we could say that on heating it became gradually more and more viscous up to a maximum viscosity, beyond which it became more and more liquid and less and less viscous. Viscous then meant a certain peculiar intermediate state between the liquid and the solid, with a maximum viscosity midway, a phenomenon so common and distinctive as to need an appropriate term. Now, however, by a misguided technicalization the term is scarcely less than Mephistophelian in its competency to beguile the unwary.

But it was not this phase of the subject, we surmise, that the association had in mind. Its members are probably ready to accept the sins of the past, if they may avoid the afflictions of the future. They probably had in mind the "pernicious activity" displayed in certain quarters in putting new names in the place of old ones, sometimes better, often worse, under pretext of correlation, etc., without a sufficient basis for so doing either in the thorough study of the formations, or of the merits of the names, or of the principles involved, and without due regard to the economies of the profession or the convenience of the public. The cheapest device for making the largest show of quasi-results in technical garb with the least investment of scientific capital known to our profession is found in giving new names to known formations, because of some real or imagined objection to the names in use, or because some new division may be thought to be better, or because some arbitrary "rule" is violated, or because of a premature assumption of the right of authoritative correlation. Certain excessive practices of this kind have reached a point where protest, if not censure, is merited. There are of course real occasions for new names and even for new systems of names, but every author is likely to overestimate the need of nomenclature in the case he has in hand, and every organization is likely to overestimate the weight of its authority. The practice of imposing new names should be held in reasonable restraint out of regard for the common convenience of the readers of the literature of the science, professional as well as non-professional.

More important than even this, however, is the desirability of keeping the path clear for a final and really satisfactory nomenclature when the appropriate historic, dynamic, classificatory, and other work that must precede a good and lasting nomenclature shall have been adequately done. This can be attained only by wide and careful study, guided by restraint, equipoise, and sagacity; and the results so reached should be approved by adequate trial before they are harnessed to final names. Pending this, the individual worker may well be allowed much liberty in the use of such terms as may suit his purpose, *if*—and this is a vital point—these are regarded as mere temporary and personal conveniences, and are held to be quite without claim to a place in an "adopted" nomenclature except as that claim shall rest upon inherent merit. The "adoption" and formal imposition of names, *as by authority*, is only tolerable when it is preceded by the only sanction of authority which the higher canons of science respect, *inherent merit based upon adequate investigation.*

The association is eminently wise in the adoption of its resolutions and it is to be hoped that the organizations to which it has addressed them will respond by a hearty co-operation, and that the end will be such wise control of the growth of our nomenclature as shall give it, at length, the highest practicable serviceability.

T. C. C.

The celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Geological Society of London, which took place recently, was an event of more than ordinary interest in that it not only signalized the great age of the society, the oldest of all geological societies, but, in calling to mind how near the beginning of geological science it had its birth, as was done by the presidential address of Sir Archibald Geikie, it emphasized the comparatively rapid development of geology as a branch of knowledge. Almost all the advancement from the realm of speculation to that of established facts has taken place during the lifetime of the Geological Society, a very great part of it having occurred within the memory of the oldest geologists present at the meeting, and in fact having been accomplished to a considerable extent by their labors.

While the function of the Centenary meeting was almost wholly social, consisting as it did, of a reception of delegates by the president of the society, Sir Archibald Geikie, an address by him, and a banquet to all the guests in the evening of the first day, followed by another banquet and a general reception on the second, together with numerous smaller entertainments of a social character, there were extended geological excursions before the meeting and shorter ones afterward. Throughout these events there was such evidence of forethought and consideration for the comfort and welfare of the guests as to reflect great credit on those who planned and managed them, and to afford a new example of proverbial English hospitality.

The Centenary meeting was also interesting because of the representative character of the geologists whom it brought together from all parts of the world. For besides the large number of British and Colonial geologists in attendance, there were 94 from foreign countries, of whom 50 were from France, Germany, and America in nearly equal numbers; the other countries represented by smaller number being Sweden, Belgium, Holland, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Mexico, and Japan, in the order given. The opportunity of renewing friendships and of exchanging ideas with colleagues from such widely remote regions was the most important feature of the meeting, and one that makes for a better understanding among geologists and a certain advancement of the science.

After the celebration in London the visitors in two groups were entertained most hospitably by the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and the honorary degree of Doctor of Science was conferred upon a number of the most distinguished Europeans: from Germany, Professor Ferdinand Zirkel and Professor Hermann Credner of Leipzig, Professor A. Penck of Berlin, and it was known that Professor Rosenbusch of Heidelberg would have received the degree had he been able to be present; from France, Professor Charles Barrois of Lille, Professor A. Lacroix and Professor A. de Lapparent of Paris; from Norway, Professor W. C. Brögger and Dr. Hans Reusch of Christiania; from Sweden, Professor A. G. Nathorst of Stockholm; from Switzerland, Professor A. Heim of Zurich; and from Belgium, Professor Louis Dollo of Brussels. That no honor was conferred at this time upon any geologist of the English-speaking peoples of America or of the British Colonies is remarkable, considering the quality and amount of work done by the older and ablest geologists in these vast territories. We trust that this inaction on the part of the great English Universities will not be misinterpreted as a lack of appreciation on their part of the attainments of the most distinguished of Colonial and American geologists, but will be attributed to causes not at present understood by those outside the Universities' councils.

J. P. I.